

## Coffee with Phil. 32. Black and White

### **Introduction.**

Well, hi and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to coffee with Phil, and of course I would be Phil and you're welcome to spend time with me this afternoon, having coffee. Just enjoyed, well, I sort of enjoyed my coffee this afternoon. I need to tell you though, world order and peace is restored. But it wasn't like that this time last week, I had ordered a new part for my coffee roaster, which arrived with instructions on how to install it. It seemed relatively simple, even for a simple guy, and so in the midst of following the instructions, I lifted out a piece, or a cap, off the top of the roaster and the plastic on the top had welded to the metal of the chamber, which gets quite hot, keeping them together, and so when I tugged one, I tugged both and the result of that was that when I re-installed everything, put it back together, it didn't work, there was an error, and so, so sadly to say I couldn't roast beans for several days, which was why the world was not in peace or balance. But anyway, thanks to some help from the friendly team at Cafe Logic, highly recommend their product and their service, video coaching at home from a technician to me, the non-technician, managed to isolate the broken connection and remedy the connection. I'm pleased to say freshly roasted beans at my house is now back in order, and so this afternoon's coffee, freshly roasted beans, well, I've gotta confess I didn't quite get the quantity right in the portafilter. I mean, my grinder does it for me automatically, but there was a perhaps a change in the humidity which changed the way the beans grind, which means I got less quantity which means less coffee and the portafilter means it pours a lot faster, and so unfortunately, a little bit of a bitter after taste for me. You might not have noticed, but I certainly did, which leads me to something. You know, I can adjust the inputs into my coffee to get the best outcome. So, grind settings, quantity settings, tamp pressure, and of course, how I do the milk. So, I can adjust the inputs to get a better outcome.

But what happens if we have an absence of answers? If we miss the data in order to make decisions, sometimes we are left wanting, you know, this is what I'm talking about today. I want to talk about the tension that comes with the absence of black and white answers.

So, can I make my coffee better? Yes, I know what to do about that. Can I learn to play the guitar? Yes, I can. Because there is steps and lessons that I could take in order to learn something new. Even if I was to ask you why is the sky blue? You could find the answer to that. It's something to do with light and darkness, but I'm not smart enough to understand that.

But what about 'when is the end of the world?' You might at your best effort interpret the Scriptures a certain way and think you've got the answer to that. But I think that would be a question that's above your pay grade and mine.

Today I wanna talk to you about how I'm learning to live in the mystery of the unknown, how am I embracing circumstances in my life where I can't find answers. Because trust me, if I keep going trying to find the answers, I'm gonna bang my head against something and it's gonna hurt, so I've had to learn how to live in the mystery of not having the answer, and today I want to talk about that. So, let's go on a journey together.

## **It magnifies the mystery of God.**

And so the first thing that I'd say here, is this absence of black and white answers, the mystery as it were, it magnifies, for me, this magnifies the mystery of who God is, the mystery of God, the awe and the wonder of a creator that is far beyond my comprehension, and I'd say this to you, a God you can define is a small God, small g, small god, and not worthy of worship.

If you could understand the mysteries of God. If you could explain the mysteries of God, then you might as well think you're God, and I love the way this is presented in the Book of Job. I recently was wrestling with the absence of answers, and why have I not really been able to fully grasp the situation, or I really felt like, you know, in the midst of testing I felt the need to, the need to know, and so the Lord led me to Job.

When I read it, not so much understanding it, but putting myself in the shoes of the characters in the story. And early in Job, chapters 9 and 10, he's really lamenting, and who am I? and God is big, and I am not, and I wish I wasn't born. He literally gets told the pit of despair, and says, I wish I wasn't born, and then his friend Zophar in Chapter 11 responds to him, and I love this, just a couple of verses in Job Chapter 11, verse seven, he says to Job, "Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty, they are higher than the heavens above. What can you do? They are deeper than the depths below. What can you know? Their measure, the measure of God, is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."

You know, as I walk in a relationship with God, I choose to put him on the throne, and me on my face before it. And I believe that's the rightful place. I believe that's where we should sit. As I said, we need to accept that we must take our place as created beings, elevating the creator of all things to the rightful place of Lordship, and I feel like when we don't allow the mystery of the absence of answers. When we're not willing to shrug our shoulders and go, 'oh, I don't know, but God does know', I feel like we are putting a demand on ourselves to be promoted into a place of God, and we replace God, and we want to, you know in my circumstances, what I was reaching for was control. I was reaching out to go, I want to control my world and therefore my circumstances. I want to control the process, I want to control the outcome, and I want to control how I feel in the midst of this space, and it was dark, and it was lonely, it was quiet, and I thought 'Why is God silent in this moment? Is it that he's holding back his anger?' and I realised that I was not taking my place as the created being, willing to submit to my Creator, who I believe is God, who I believe is my Lord, and I who believe is the one I'll spend eternity with. If I'm not willing to take my rightful place as his creation, then really can I say he's God, or am I actually saying I'd like to be God myself?

So, I have to remind myself of the journey of Job, and I find the arguments a little confusing. I find the positions that his friends take, ah, somewhat arrogant, but somewhat, you know, like trying to be helpful, but slapping their friend around. And I watch Job as you read the story. I watch him seesaw, and ride the roller coaster of emotions, and I can relate, and I see at the end, which is the most important part to me, the book of Job is the end of the story. When God thunders and said 'you will answer me' and he puts a whirlwind of statements across the mind of Job that must have confounded him to the point where he said 'I was wrong. I tried to be God and I am not', and God took that as a confession of repentance, offered forgiveness on the back of that repentance immediately, with no conditions attached to it, and then proceeded to sort out the issues of the friends. And again, I don't get that, I don't understand really what God's doing there, that's beyond my comprehension.

But I do know that the book is called the Book of Job because it's about the life of Job and his relationship with God, and I have learned from that, that the magnification of the mystery of God is one of the wonders of my life that I am left just smiling in the mystery of the ways of God that I can't explain. I don't want to be that smart. I don't need to be that smart, and I figure out that the more God gives me, the more trouble I might be in, and so that's the first thought I've got there, and so in this journey that we're talking about today, with the tension of the absence of the black and white chances that we think we need, that we reach for, and yet God knows in his infinite wisdom that we're far better off without a lot of the answers that we think we need.

### **It magnifies the need for faith.**

The second thought I have with regards to this is it absolutely magnifies the need for me to have faith, and faith is the currency I've learned of life with God. The more faith we have, the more life of God we experience or can be able to appreciate. God's everywhere, he's all around us, he's intricately involved in every single person's life, and yet, often we're just not aware of the extent of it. But faith allows us to see things, or have things revealed to us that is not necessarily tangible or real to everybody else, and the thing that should motivate me the most in this area is like, turning to Hebrews Chapter 11, you know, the idea, this hallmark of faith, this Hall of Fame, as it were. It says there in verse 6 without faith it's impossible to please God, for the one who approaches God must believe that he exists, and he rewards those who seek him.

So this idea that if I accept the absence of answers in faith that God is God and I'm not, then this faith is something that pleases God, and as a son, I want to please the father. And so I've gotta live in this way where I can be convinced, verse one says faith is being sure of what we hope for, being convinced of what we do not see, and through it, verse two says, the ancients, or the elders of the day, received God's commendation, that they had his favour and his light upon their lives. Because they lived in faith means that they moved in confidence that God was doing something, even though they couldn't understand it, and you know, Abraham, the father of all faith, it says obeyed, he was called to go to a place he wouldn't hear it and he went without understanding or knowing where he was going.

Man, that inspires me, and I was thinking back, 'cause I'm trying to strengthen myself in this, I'm trying to live in the mystery, and understand that God is mysterious and that's totally fine, and was thinking back, there was a time I was just remembering this afternoon, there was a time, way back 2007, I think it was, none of us knew that there was a global financial crisis coming. Well, certainly no one in my world, no one at my level. There's probably economists and others that could predict it, but I didn't know it was coming. And we were tracking along relatively well to be fair, and I really felt like God say to me, it's time to sell those houses you own, and you need to do it now. And look, my attitude with property in those days was very much like buy and hold. We buy to keep, we don't buy to sell, you know, we had accumulated a collection of rental properties that was quite sizable, and quite helpful to our economy.

But I felt like the Lord say, it's time to sell now, and I look, I couldn't explain it. It was completely contrary to what I had set up, and what I wanted to do, but I had to choose to be obedient because I couldn't explain it, and so one by one, we had the strategy, and we followed the strategy, and we sold what was before us as the Lord had asked us to. And you see, what I didn't know was the global financial crisis was just around the corner. 2008 crept upon me with a very, very dark and long shadow, and if I hadn't positioned our family with the sale of those houses, and the capital, the cash that came out of it, we just wouldn't have lasted the journey, you know, with the market crashing and values crashing, and no one wanting to buy property. If I'd waited a year until I needed to sell, I would have been absolutely stuffed. And so this, to me, is a testimony that reinforces to me, 'cause I like to listen to testimonies, to access faith. This just shows me that sometimes we gotta do what we can't explain, and God's on the other side of it.

And so, the mystery of God. You know, if I find myself thinking well, God's asked me to do something and I'm going to sit here until he tells me why. Then I reckon I'm going to miss the boat, and I don't know what you're going through right now, but I just sense there's a couple of people listening to this podcast that are really wanting God to answer questions and he's sitting there going 'it's better for you if I don't'. So let go of your need to have the answers and move convince that God has asked you to do something and be confident of what you can't see, knowing that God has gone before you.

And I wrote this question down for me to ponder in my quiet time, 'what can I believe God for in the absence of visible evidence?', such a challenging question. 'What can I believe God for in the absence of visible evidence?' And even as I'm asking this question for you to consider, I'm hearing it, and I'm hearing the Holy Spirit say a few things to me which are answers to that question, and that's what I love about God. He doesn't hide things from us. He hides things for us to discover. He's a loving father who gets excited when we discover the mysteries, and I don't want to preach a sermon, and I've got all these scriptures open in front of me that I've just been reading from Colossians about the mystery of God and the Gospel of Jesus being revealed and well, that's for you to go and explore if you want to.

But look here, I'm saying, this absence of black and white answers for me is answered, or justified, or explained away, by the mystery of God being bigger than me, and the absolute need I have for faith, and I want you to contemplate that as I contemplate it.

**God's timing doesn't match mine.**

And the third and final area that I wanted to just refer to in my own meanderings and ponderings, that I'm sharing with you today, is around this tension of the absence of the black and white answers, that leads me to accept that God's timing is often not my timing. And I think that's really what causes me to often get confounded, or confused, or just really scratching my head going 'seriously, God is this where I am right now?' and it's not that God's word has changed, I've come to realise in my mind that it's actually just that what I thought was going to happen didn't happen in the time frame that I anticipated, expected, or hoped it would happen.

God's timing often doesn't match my expectations, and what this means is, I've got to keep walking forward without being able to see the destination. I've got to live in the mystery of the moment, and I'm often, lately I've been saying, 'you know, Lord, if you don't turn up, I'm either gonna look like an idiot, or I'm gonna fall over and bang my head open,' and I don't say that, you know, as a threat or as manipulation. I'm just, I'm actually confessing it as an absolute dependence on God coming through in my circumstances. And I just I'm learning to like it. I'm learning to enjoy the absence of control. I'm learning to, you know, I think I've said this to you before the saying 'let go and let God', has to become a reality, more, and more, and more in our lives. And I think the more mature we are, the more willing we are to let go and let God, and if you flip that over and say, if you have a need still to control the outcome or understand God, then perhaps that's revealing your immaturity in faith, and I say that lovingly as an invitation and a challenge to you to grow up and move on beyond baby steps.

As an example in all of this, I just wanted to share a story. We were post crisis, but still walking out of it. We found ourselves walking around Paris with the kids, and we had a fantastic couple of days, it was really exciting. Most of what we did didn't cost money, and we had a miracle at the Eiffel Tower with some foreigners who took pity on us and helped us out, and were very encouraging to us in the time that we were feeling really unsettled, and then we wandered, and we wandered, and we wandered one day, we ended up down the end of the river at the other end from where we were staying, and we found the Louvre, the art gallery, and you might have seen it in movies or on TV. There's a this big pyramid like glass shape above the ground, and a whole lot of amazing things under the ground, and our daughter Gracie, I wouldn't say she's an artist, but she's artistic, and uh, she really, really was excited about this because she'd read about the Mona Lisa, and a whole lot of other things, and, you know, we would have loved to just go and buy the tickets, and we stood in the lobby, looking at the sign and the prices, and our hearts just dropped, and we're like, 'why did God lead us here? Why did God bring us to this place for us to be disappointed, and to feel disappointing as parents?' and at that moment we, Kathy, I didn't have to say any words, we looked at each other and our hearts broke because we knew we were both thinking the same thing, and at that time a lady, just basically stood between us as though she wanted to get our attention, and I was, it was kind of a very confrontational, but very Parisian, the French are like that, and she started yelling at us in French, and waving her arms, and pointing at the kids, and we were kind of didn't know whether to be scared. We don't know whether to be aggressive and defensive or what we should do, and fortunately what I assume was her daughter stepped in and said in English, 'Let me explain. My mother is saying she wants to help you, and we have four tickets to the Louvre for you and she wants to give them to you. Would you be willing to accept them?', and with our jaws just, I got a bruise on my chin because my jaw hit the floor. I was just astounded at the that, the miracle, and the mystery of what was going on, I couldn't explain it, and we looked at and we quizzed and we asked for confirmation. We said to this girl, 'Are you sure?', and she said 'yes, yes. my mother wants to give you these tickets', and she gave us four tickets and the date was right, the time was right, and we got access to the move, and we had an amazing time, and plenty of photos, and stories resulted from it, but I can't explain it, I can't fathom the extent that God went to, to orchestrate that, to take us to a place, and then open a door of an amazing provision that was just such a blessing to us, and I've got stories like that, that I just keep collecting, and I keep reminding myself of those stories because they remind me of the mystery of God, the need for me to walk in faith, and the need for me to let go of the control of the timing and trust God, that wherever he leads me, he will be there for me.

## **Close.**

And so, as I close this podcast, I really don't, I don't think I've got a conclusion. I think I'm always going to learn to live in the mystery as it's revealed in greater depths, in greater ways, as I walk with God, and get to know his ways better. But here's what I've resolved to do. I've resolved to stop asking this question, 'why did this happen to me?', but what I am going to do is I am going to start asking a question like 'why do I feel like this God?', and I've shared with you before that the Lord uses our emotions and feelings as a signpost to point to something. So rather than taking the blame approach and saying 'why did this happen?', what I'm saying is, 'God, what are you teaching me in this situation? What is my emotions, and my thought patterns, what are they pointing to?' and I think, you know, that God wants us to learn more about ourselves, and in doing so he has revealed, and that's part of that mystery.

I just want to reinforce for myself, and I hope that you're listening to this while I, I've guessed by now, that God's using this to speak to people. I just want you to know that God will fully love you no matter what you do, no matter what you think, and no matter what you say, he wants to be revealed, and he's not judging you and condemning you. He is trying to prove who he is through your circumstances, not because he needs it, but because you need it.

So, God will love you fully. God will extend his grace upon you, over you, and around you, and all he is looking for, is for you to embrace the mystery of who he is as God, and accept that you are not God, and that's the journey I've been on.

So, this is Coffee with Phil Episode 32. Thanks for hanging out with me this afternoon. I hope wherever you are, you've enjoyed your coffee and that you, perhaps you've been provoked, and challenged about who God is, and who God wants to be revealed as in your life.

If you're not currently someone that could say you're in a relationship with God, then reach out because that's always a fun conversation to talk with people about and I'd be happy to do that.

So, May God richly bless you as you walk through your day with him, and may he be revealed to you in a ever increasing way. I've enjoyed being with you and I look forward to hanging out sometime soon, take care.